

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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RADIO ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE NATION

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. This year, we've seen a disturbing string of weather-related emergencies all around our country, from flash floods in Tennessee to wildfires in Florida to ice storms last winter in New England. This summer, record heat and drought are taking a terrible human toll, destroying crops, causing power outages, worst of all, taking lives. Just since June, more than 130 people have died because of the heat.

Certainly, the latest El Nino is partly to blame for the severe weather conditions that have besieged so many communities. But growing evidence suggests that the extreme and erratic weather we're seeing in America and around the world is being intensified by global warming.

Consider this: 1997 was the warmest year on record, and 1998 is on track to break that record. Five of the hottest years in history -- the five hottest years have all occurred in the 1990s. Scientists predict that July may be the hottest month since mankind began recording temperatures. The world's leading climate experts predict even more extreme weather unless we reverse this dangerous warming trend.

We're doing everything we can in the short-term to help communities cope with this devastating heat wave. This week, I released \$100 million in emergency funds to the 11 hottest states. On Monday, Agriculture Secretary Glickman and FEMA Director James Lee Witt will travel to Texas and Oklahoma to see what more we can do to help there. Today, I'm pleased to announce that the Department of Energy will begin providing new crisis assistance to low-income families, repairing and replacing air-conditioners and fans, installing insulation, and giving advice on the best way to keep homes cool in this extreme heat.

But to meet the long-term challenge of global warming, we must do more. Vice President Gore and I have launched a comprehensive, cost-effective strategy to protect our environment, while creating new opportunities for economic growth. I've proposed \$6.3 billion in research and tax incentives over the next five years to encourage the private sector to work with us to improve our energy efficiency, generate clean power, and reduce the greenhouse gases that contribute so much to global warming.

We must all do our part to protect the environment, and as the nation's largest energy consumer, the federal government must lead. At my direction, we're undertaking a multipart initiative to put our own house in order. Today, I'm pleased to announce the first four parts of this plan, aimed at increasing the efficiency of federal buildings.

First, I'm directing federal agencies to work more closely with private contractors to retrofit federal buildings and other facilities with the best energy-saving technology, at no cost to taxpayers. Second, we'll replace hundreds of thousands of conventional light bulbs and fixtures with more efficient fluorescents, which will pay back in energy savings nearly five times what they cost to install. Third, I'm directing all agencies to work toward bringing their existing buildings up to EPA's "Energy Star" standard of energy efficiency. And fourth, the Defense Department and six other federal agencies will adopt "sustainable design" guidelines for all new federal buildings to reduce their energy use.

Now, together these measures will save taxpayers as much as \$1 billion a year in energy costs. They'll help to jump-start markets for new technologies, and they'll protect our environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We are facing squarely the problem of global warming -- but there are still some in Congress who would rather pretend it doesn't exist. Despite mounting evidence, they would deny the science and ignore the warning signs. Rather than invest in a common-sense strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they want to cut programs for energy efficiency and renewable energy -- programs that long have enjoyed bipartisan support.

Worst of all, some have even tried to keep the public from learning the facts about global warming by barring federal agencies from even talking about the issue. Thankfully, this gag order was defeated in the House of Representatives just this week. Global warming is real; the risks it poses are real; and the American people have a right to know it and a responsibility to do something about it. The sooner Congress understands that, the sooner we can protect our nation -- and our planet -- from increased flood, fire, drought, and deadly heat waves.

To protect our environment, we must put progress ahead of partisanship. For nearly 30 years now, we've had a bipartisan commitment to preserving the environment. We have to bring it to this new challenge.

As sweltering as this summer has been, if we don't act now, our children may look back on the summer of 1998 as one that was relatively mild and cool. There's no excuse for delay. We have the tools, we have the ingenuity to head off this threat. We have the opportunity and the deepest of obligations to leave our children and our grandchildren a healthy, thriving planet -- God's great gift to us all.

Thanks for listening.

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